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*The Fall of Nineveh.*¹—By CHRISTOPHER JOHNSTON, Professor
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At the death of King Ashurbanipal, in 626 B. C., the Assyrian empire still extended from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. But to the West, Syria, disorganized by the Scythian and Kimmerian invasion, was ready to fall a prey to Egypt at the first favorable opportunity. To the North the Scythians held full sway and, though for the time being friendly to Assyria, were too powerful to be altogether comfortable neighbors. To the East, the Medes, enemies both of Assyria and of the Scythians, were pressing westward to the frontier of Assyria and southward into Elam, which had been devastated by Ashurbanipal and left defenseless. In the South, the Chaldean Nabopolassar promptly took advantage of the death of the Assyrian monarch to make himself king of Babylon, though at first his rule did not extend beyond the ancient city and the district immediately adjacent.

Ashurbanipal was succeeded by his son Ashur-etil-ilâni, of whose reign little is known. Dated contract tablets show that he ruled both in Assyria and in Babylonia until at least the year 622. He probably died soon after this date. His successor, and the last king of Assyria, was his brother Sin-shar-ishkun, the Sarcus of classical writers. Fragments of his inscriptions have been found referring to wars in which the Assyrian arms were successful. These inscriptions seem to date from the earlier part of his reign, and it is probable that his adversaries were the Medes. Two contract tablets are dated at Sippara in the second year of this king, and one is dated at Erech in his seventh year, so that he could claim sovereignty in Babylonia down to the year 615 or later.

Between this date and 611 B. C. there must have been a change in the situation, since a contract tablet dated at Sippara in the fifteenth year of Nabopolassar indicates that the Chaldean king of Babylon then had possession of northern Babylonia. The inscriptions of Nabopolassar refer to wars in which the aid of the gods brought him success, and in one of them he claims

¹ Abstract of a paper read before the American Oriental Society, April 12, 1901. The paper will be published entire elsewhere.

the conquest of the Mesopotamian district of Subaru. From this it would appear that he had not only made himself master of a considerable portion, if not the whole, of Babylonia, but had overrun some of the most important provinces of the Assyrian empire. This rapid extension of the dominions of Nabopolassar argues weakness on the part of Assyria, and may well have coincided with the events described in Herodotus I, 103-106.

According to the Greek historian, the Medes, under their King Cyaxares, invaded Assyria and had actually invested Nineveh when the siege was raised by an army commanded by the Scythian king Madyes, son of Protothyas. There seems to be no good reason for doubting this statement, and the relief of Nineveh, which probably occurred in the year 610, left the Assyrian king Sin-shar-ishkun free to carry on a vigorous campaign against Nabopolassar, who, deprived of Median aid and opposed by some of the Babylonian cities, now found himself in a most dangerous predicament. He was saved by the Medes, who, having in the mean time signally defeated their Scythian opponents, now returned to the attack, and Nineveh was once more besieged. But the complete investment of the great city was by no means easy to accomplish. The Tigris ran close by her walls, and strong fortifications along the river connected her with the strong cities of Asshur and Kelach. The western bank of the Tigris gave communication with Mesopotamia, whence both supplies and troops could be drawn, and so long as this important district held out for Assyria the reduction of the capital was well nigh hopeless.

It was necessary, therefore, that the country to the west of the Tigris should be rendered useless both as a source of supplies and as a base of military operations. This seems to have been effected by dispatching strong detachments to thoroughly ravage the country, destroy all opposing forces, and render harmless the frontier cities of Babylonia which sided with Sin-shar-ishkun. Their object accomplished, the Median detachments could rejoin their main body, leaving to Nabopolassar the easy task of holding the devastated district in subjection.

When the Medes, after reducing Assyria, proceeded to dispossess their Scythian neighbors and to extend their dominions in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia was left to Nabopolassar and the wily Chaldean thus enjoyed the fruits of a vicarious victory. Nineveh was now cut off from outside aid, but behind her strong fortifica-

tions her garrison could still offer a stubborn resistance. When at length the Medes prevailed and the city fell, all was not yet lost. Kelach was little inferior to Nineveh in strength, and thither Sin-shar-ishkun fell back to make a new stand. But fate was against him. An unusual rise of the Tigris undermined the wall, and the city, now at the mercy of the besiegers, was sacked and burnt.

According to tradition, the siege of Nineveh lasted for two years, and this, if it be taken to include the whole course of events down to the fall of Kelach, is doubtless correct. As the Median attack, according to data derived from cuneiform sources, began in the year 608, it was in 606 B. C. that the reign of Sin-shar-ishkun came to an end together with the last remnants of the monarchy he represented.